The Temporal Donut Incident
By Jonathan Olvera

Arriving in the morning was like waking up in the middle of someone else's dream—a dream full of fog, radio static, and a vague smell of burnt popcorn and lavender oil. A small farm town, mostly unchanged since the Truman administration, blinked into being under a grayish-blue sky. The centerpiece: a square, clay-brick and wooden town hall, which doubled—oddly enough—as the community meeting place and donut shop.

The sign on the front read: **WELCOME TIME TRAVELERS!** in bold, government-issued Helvetica. No explanation. Just that. Which was either charming or deeply unsettling depending on how recently you'd left your own timeline.

Inside the town hall, the scene was halfway between a community brunch and a sci-fi convention. Twenty-five or so folks had gathered—though "folks" may not be the right word. Among them were men in togas, warriors with bronze helmets, a few cyborgs sipping decaf, and one being who looked like a living mood ring with feet. They were Romans, Germans, aliens, Nephites, and people from futures so distant they didn't have vowels in their names anymore.

They called themselves the Rag-Tag Group of Time Travelers—a support group, as it turned out. Think Alcoholics Anonymous meets *Doctor Who*, but with less funding.

The air smelled like fried dough and overcooked mystery. I stepped inside, clutching a slightly crumpled dollar and twenty-five cents, suspicious of the cheerful chaos. I bought a cup of coffee and a jelly donut that looked like it had seen better centuries.

A piece of paper taped to the espresso machine read:

> **Welcome Time Travelers! Please behave responsibly and avoid paradoxes. Coffee refills are 75¢.**

Ten minutes hadn't passed before a loud *zsssssh* sound opened the door and in walked a tall man in a trench coat with boots so shiny you could probably see your own birth in them. He was German, I was sure—he had the intense eyes and the punctual energy of someone who'd once argued with Einstein. He walked straight to the snack table and began scanning the bagels like he was looking for clues.

The buildings outside looked fake, too clean, too symmetrical. Their clay and wooden facades matched each other like Sims houses built by a really enthusiastic algorithm. Some of the aliens were clearly advanced—they had glowing collars and refused to touch anything not sterilized. One spoke only in humming noises and refused to blink.

Then… a clown showed up.

But not the funny kind. He wore normal clothes—a beige windbreaker, jeans—but his aura screamed “birthday party trauma.” His red nose was subtle but unmistakable. Everyone knew what he was. You don’t forget a clown, even when they try to blend in.

And then it happened.

A green laser shot up into the air—high, humming, unnatural. The lights dimmed. Every watch in the room stopped ticking.

“I CAUGHT YOU ALL, TIME TRAVELERS!” the clown bellowed, standing atop a folding chair like it was a throne.

Some of us flinched. I didn’t.

“And what are you going to do about it?” I shouted back, with the bravado of someone who still had half a donut left.

A few others nodded in agreement.

“I am aware of *all* your arrivals,” the clown went on. “The illusion has ended. Time is collapsing. And you—*you*—are the anomaly!”

Suddenly, the floor beneath us vibrated like a dying washing machine. The core of the earth, or at least this patch of it, felt like it shut off. Gravity became a suggestion. Everything flattened—reality, logic, even the coffee.

The only thing still visible was the green laser, beaming upward like the spotlight of a very confused alien god.

Then an alien stood up, a shimmering purple creature with tendrils and a voice like wind through foil. “Do not fear,” he said, casually adjusting a device on his wrist. “I can recode this timeline with a complex algorithm. I just need eight minutes and a muffin.”

“No need,” I said, feeling bold. “We can just set the whole place on fire and hope it resets!”

“Nein,” the German added. “I can build a portal using crystals and color spectrums. I’ve done this with scraps before. I once escaped 1347 with just quartz and a bag of Skittles.”

Then the clown—yes, the clown—raised his hand and said, “I’m interdimensional. I can take us all to a dimension where everything is the same.”

We all stopped.

“You can do that?” I asked.

“Sure,” he replied. “It’s basically like turning it off and back on again.”

It was… beautiful. The simplest solution to the most absurd situation.

“Well let’s do *that* then!” I yelled.

“Aye!” cried the German.

“YES, MAN!” echoed the alien.

There was a sudden, unspoken agreement. The group lined up. Everyone grabbed a coffee refill. The clown drew a strange symbol in the air using only his finger and the fog around us. Something clicked. Or maybe blinked. Or warped. Time itself gave a little burp.

“HERE WE GO!” cried the clown.

“POW!”

And we were back.

Same place. Same town hall. Donut shop still smelled like cinnamon and weird decisions. Only… a few things were off.

For starters, the coffee tasted like root beer. The jelly in my donut had turned bright blue. And the building now had a small plaque on the wall that read:

> **PROPERTY OF THE INFINITE DONUT COUNCIL – REALITY VERSION 4.7B**

I looked around. The German was browsing community announcements. The alien was making small talk with a Nephite about taxes. The clown had vanished, of course.

I blinked a few times and checked the schedule. I had errands to run anyway—dog licenses, trash pickup, maybe register as a known temporal anomaly.

What a hilarious donut and coffee event.

And that’s how Thursday mornings go… when you accidentally show up to a time travel support group meeting.